

fitting in

FAKING THE UNFITTED LOOK TO CREATE A CASUAL KITCHEN

BY TIM GIHRING PHOTOGRAPH BY KAREN MELVIN

When Y&A Architecture was asked to remodel a 1940s rambler in the Kenwood neighborhood of Minneapolis, the design options were nearly limitless—the house was torn down to its foundation. In its place was built a shingle-style home with New England detailing, a look that fit much better with the area's traditional houses. The kitchen was designed to take advantage of the open interior.

"Access to the outside was a big part of the kitchen," says Marc Asmus, the "A" in Y&A. "We added this big terrace that wraps around three sides of the house. They really live out on that terrace." Large windows fit the bill. And a breakfast room was created for the days when it's not terrace weather. "They wanted the eating area to be a read-the-Sunday-paper kind of space," says Asmus. "It feels like you're in the garden."

But one look at the cooking island tells you this isn't an ordinary open-plan kitchen. "The island is made to look like tables kind of pushed together," Asmus says. It's the unfitted look, which Asmus says has been the hottest style in kitchen design for the past few years, though it's long been big in Europe. An unfitted kitchen consists of many standalone pieces—a hutch, a desk, even an armchair—but trading counter space for comfort hasn't been an easy sell to Americans. That's where Y&A worked some wonders.

"It's fake unfitted cabinetry," says Asmus. The tables, for instance, look like they have legs but they're actually built in. Very little storage space was lost. "We were trying to find an inexpensive way to approximate the unfitted look. That can get very expensive to build all of your kitchen cabinets as furniture." The homeowners didn't care about following the letter of the unfitted look; they were simply interested in achieving the feel.

"Sometimes it can be all about the gizmos and the pullouts and the accessories," says Asmus of kitchen design. "But the bottom line is that you make a beautiful space." ■

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The centerpiece of the kitchen is the island that approximates the unfitted look. It may look like the pieces are just pushed together, but they are actually built in.







the kitchen transformation

Bright, modern design breaks free of dark, dated cocoon

BY H. PATRICK MEYER PHOTOGRAPHS BY KAREN MELVIN



A galley kitchen, bookended by an eating parlor and foyer, offers streamlined spaciousness.

RIGHT The brightened, newly renovated sunroom harmonizes with the made-over kitchen area, while featuring a dramatic vista of Lake of the Isles. **BELOW** The family eating addition combines coziness and warmth with a flood of natural light from three French casement windows.



Like a pre-emergent butterfly, the kitchen of this hilltop Lake of the Isles home was enclosed and shrouded in darkness. Nothing short of a dramatic transmutation could unleash the space's vast potential.

The kitchen's inner ebullience was stifled by outdated plastic-laminate cabinetry ringing a light-starved main cooking area, scuffed linoleum floor, and seafoam-blue walls. For the extroverted homeowner who cherishes interacting with family and friends while cooking and entertaining, the cheerless surroundings in the kitchen and adjacent foyer were hopelessly out of kilter.

But transforming the kitchen area posed some ticklish questions: How do you harmonize a contemporary, streamlined kitchen with a Spanish colonial-style home? How do you envisage an uplifting milieu when confronted with dreary and cramped space punctuated with ill-situated walls and cabinets?

"It would have been overwhelming to think of it as one big meandering kitchen," says Bryan Meyer, an architectural designer at Y & A Architecture in Minneapolis. "The key was breaking down this large volume into three individual volumes, each offering something different."

Enlarging the squeezed quarters formerly housing a mudroom hall presented the most formidable challenge. After a number of head-scratching iterations, a design emerged using a hidden I-beam scheme, which met weight-bearing concerns. A lowered, 8-foot ceiling and quaint wraparound bench seating with ample storage provides the intimate retreat the homeowner prefers for family sit-downs. The addition of three French casement windows, one of which offers a gorgeous lake vista, provide ample light.

"We could have made the addition even larger, but it would have been kind of a tail-wagging-the-dog space," Meyer

says. "From the outside, the space looks like it's always been there and is respectful to the rest of the house."

The center section formerly housing the bank of cabinets is now a galley kitchen featuring a higher, 9-foot ceiling and Italian Carrera white marble countertops. A cooking lane on one end is dominated by a commercial-scale stainless-steel stove, while a cleaning lane showcases hand-restored original French casement windows that overlook an outdoor brick-lined patio dotted with café tables and lounge chairs. The center island's teal-green, overlay-style cabinets smartly contrast with the white cabinetry elsewhere, producing an effect Meyer calls "a little like a ship floating in space."

The foyer required the most versatility, because it had to serve as a transitional zone between the kitchen work area and traditional formal dining room and beyond, while offering space conducive for stand-up socializing. The effect is achieved with a barrel-vaulted ceiling, lots of natural light streaming in

through a terrace door flanked with spacious sidelights, and double-arched doors leading to the dining room. The open, inviting atmosphere is enhanced by classic inset-style china cabinetry magnified by integrated spot lighting.

Overall, the transformation is striking. For the first time, the homeowner can enjoy Lake of the Isles from one end of the house to the other, from the family eating parlor to the kitchen, dining and living rooms, and newly renovated sunroom. Cream-colored walls and darker-stained oak floors throughout the house are unifying elements.

Beyond that, Meyer says the darker, lush furnishings in most of the house peacefully coexist with the dramatic amount of light and clean, contemporary style in the renovated kitchen.

Finally, a stage for the kitchen to unabashedly spread its wings. ■

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RIGHT Awash in natural light, the versatile foyer teams with an outdoor patio to provide expanded opportunities for socializing.